

Home
Miss.

The Old Cottonwood



The
Congregational Home Missionary Society
287 Fourth Avenue, New York



THIS MONUMENT MARKS A HISTORIC SPOT
WHERE THIRTY-FIVE LIE BURIED,
THEY PLAYED THE DRAMA CALLED LIFE
FOR FORTUNE AND FAME,
LOST THEIR LIVES, LOST THEIR GAME.

IN MEMORY
OF THOSE WHO RAZED THE WALL
AND CHANGED TO BE THE WALL
IN DEATH AND SPIRIT THEY LIE
AND IN THIS HILL, THEY REST.

"BOOT HILL" MONUMENT

THE OLD COTTONWOOD

I AM going through a part of the country to-day that you have read much about," said Superintendent Johnson of Montana to the lady visitor from the East. "How would you like to jump into the Service Car and visit some of my people?"

"Very much," said the visitor, hastily putting on her hat and coat. She climbed into the car, and the engine hit a steady pace, as if it realized a three-hundred-and-twenty-four-mile trip lay ahead.

"Over there," said Mr. Johnson, as they traveled along the canyon road from the Yellowstone River valley to the bench lands above, "is 'Boot Hill.' Would you like to get out and look around?"

"Of course," said the visitor, and they crossed the road to inspect one of the curious reminders of the Old West. It had been a cemetery in the days when men were not buried but "planted," and most of those who slept there had "died with their boots on," usually during some drunken fight.

Thirty miles further along they came to a turn in the road. Mr. Johnson stopped

the car. "On that rock over there," he said, "is an inscription you ought to see. It says 'William Clark, July 26, 1806.'"

"This," said Mr. Johnson, "is one of two records left by Lewis and Clark, who explored this country more than a hundred years ago."

"What a difference there is between their lives and those of the men who lie on 'Boot Hill,'" said his fellow traveler, "theirs was an example all American boys may well follow."

After another twenty-five miles over roads that twisted and turned among the hills of sandstone and scrub pine, they came to a busy little town.

"What place is this?" inquired the visitor, "and does it have a history?"

"It does. This is Custer, the place where the famous battle was fought and General Custer and all his soldiers were killed by the Indians. A few miles further on we will come to 'Peas Bottom,' the scene of another Indian battle."

At "Peas Bottom" the car stopped again, but Mr. Johnson did not speak of the fight. Instead he pointed to an old cottonwood tree, twisted and bent. "Here," he said, "is something that seems to me a symbol of

life in these plains and mountains. I am going to take a picture of it." He opened his camera and snapped the shutter.

"I can't see any resemblance between that tree and life in the West," remarked the lady. "It is a wonderful country and there are wonderful people in it."

"There are," said Mr. Johnson, "and the boys and girls should have a chance—a real chance—in life. You see, if when that tree was young, a fence had been put around it, the driftwood cleared away, and an irrigation ditch dug, which would have made the land fertile as well as watered the roots of the cottonwood, it would not have been trampled by herds of buffalo, savages would not have sunk tomahawks into it, and prairie fires would not have scorched it. If it had had a chance it would have grown straight, strong and beautiful."

"I see," the visitor exclaimed, "as the twig is bent the tree is inclined."

"Exactly," the missionary Superintendent went on. "Those rough men who died in drunken brawls and were buried on 'Boot Hill' were boys who might have become a credit to their country. But in most cases they grew up without a Sunday

School, without a minister, and without God. Like the old cottonwood their lives were bent, hacked, twisted and broken. Isn't it wonderful to think that no one has been 'planted' on 'Boot Hill' since the year the Congregational church in the valley was built? Men have died with more years, fewer scars and better deeds to their credit—and they have had Christian burial.

"Some years ago, before friends gave me the Service Car, I had a motorcycle on which to travel to places where I preached and visited with the people. I started one day to hold services for some folks a good many miles away. As I rode along I passed a new grave. A board was stuck at the head and on it were the words, 'He got tired of living.' I preached to seventy people that day in a grove of cottonwood trees, and after the service an old sheepherder put out his left hand (his right had been shot off) and said: 'Parson, that's the first sermon I've heard in forty-five years. My partner died last spring, and he had not heard one since we enlisted back in '61.'

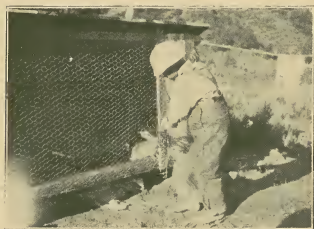
"There was something in that handclasp that made me glad it had been possible for me to be there that Sunday afternoon.

“Do you think these things are too terrible to tell? They are true. Take another look at the cottonwood tree. Doesn’t its twisted, gnarled, warped form make one think of a life that started out bravely but turned aside and went down in shame and despair? But if you look more closely, you will see that the top is reaching up into the light and warmth of day. It is somewhat protected and watered now and it is coming back to life. And so are many of the men. They have caught the message of hope carried by the minister. The scars are there, but the new, eager reaching upward is beautiful.”

“I see what you mean,” the lady visitor said. “We cannot blame the tree for its bent, scarred form. It has done well to live. When we think of the buffalo hoofs, the driftwood, the tomahawks—when we think of what it has been through, we are proud of it. And the men, away from home, church, Sunday School, with no minister to bury their dead—can we blame them for dying as they did? Was there a stronger motive for building saloons on the frontier than for building churches?”

Just then Mr. Johnson stopped before a small ranch house eighty-seven miles from

the railroad and fifteen from the nearest settlement. There was a boy in the family, one of the jolliest little fellows the eastern lady had ever seen, with a smile that spread all over his face. She thought he was as cheery as the cottonwood tree must have been many years ago. There was also a baby in the home, just big enough



“THE BOY IN THE FAMILY”

to toddle around. How Jimmie smiled when Mr. Johnson told him a Sunday School was soon to be started nearby and that he and his little sister could go every Sunday.

“A frontier preacher can travel many miles on the strength of a smile like that,” remarked Mr. Johnson when they were

once more in the car, going from place to place with word of the new Sunday School.

“The preacher, the Sunday School and the church are bringing a new state of things into this country,” remarked the lady visitor, as the car was finally turned toward home. “But you say there are 27,000,000 boys and girls and young people under twenty-two years of age in this country who have no Sunday School, church, minister, or teachers, to keep them from becoming warped, twisted and broken. Is there nothing at all being done for them?”

“Yes, The Congregational Home Missionary Society will send out as many ministers and organize as many churches and Sunday Schools as the money they receive from the denomination will permit. There are a large number of missionaries at work in the western plains and mountains, in the cities, in the sunny South and the frozen North, but so many more are needed!”

“Well, when I go back home, I am going to tell the people there all I have seen and heard about the need of ministers and churches out here. And I am going to

show everybody the picture of the old cottonwood tree and ask them to help in making young lives straight and strong. I never knew before that a penny, nickle, dime and dollar given to the Home Missionary Society counted for so much. I am sure the boys and girls in my Sunday School will want to help when they hear of all this and that they will be delighted to watch the dollars they give help place a minister on some field or buy a Service Car so that some missionary in a far-off western community may be able to preach in several places."

"If all Sunday School teachers would do the same thing," said the Superintendent, "I am certain that many places without services would have them and that more boys and girls like those we have just seen would have Sunday Schools. If all the children in our stronger Sunday Schools only knew that their gifts turn into wheels for Service Cars which carry the Gospel messenger to far-away places, and go into the pockets of missionaries who would otherwise have to give up their work, I am sure these lonely little folks out here would have a real chance to become useful Christian citizens. Let the

treasurer know that every dollar sent to the Home Missionary Society for the purpose of placing cars or ministers on Western fields will be credited on the apportionment."

\$50 will help pay a missionary's salary. (Write for the name of one your school would like to help.)

\$500 will buy a Congregational Service Car. (Small sums will be applied to its purchase. How much will your school give?)

\$5, \$10, \$15 will help buy tires, keep the car running, and purchase gasoline for long trips. Wouldn't your school like to keep some car in good order?

The need of cars for our Western fields is pressing. Gifts for this special purpose should be marked "For Congregational Service Cars" and will be considered as designated for that purpose only.

